

State Dept. review completed

\*\*\*\*\* S E C R E T \*\*\*\*\* S C O P Y

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## TO THE WHITE HOUSE

S E C R E T 161723Z DEC 73 SENSITIVE EYES ONLY

HAKTO 52 IMMEDIATE

FOR SCOWCROFT FROM THE SECRETARY

**PLEASE PASS FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO THE PRESIDENT:**

I HAD A SIX AND ONE-HALF HOUR CONVERSATION WITH ASAD WHICH GAVE ME AN INSIGHT INTO SYRIAN CHARACTER AND SHREWDNESS. ASAD IS INTELLIGENT, TOUGH, PERSONABLE WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR, A LEADER WHO SEEMS TO BE WALKING A TIGHTROPE IN FACE OF INTERNAL PRESSURES FROM THE BAATH PARTY. THERE IS NO QUESTION, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS THE TOUGHEST AND LEAST CONCILIATORY ARAB LEADER THAT I HAVE MET.

HE WAS RELAXED ON THE QUESTION OF THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE FROM THE 18TH TO THE 21ST, MAKING THE POINT TO ME THAT SYRIA PROBABLY WOULD NOT GO TO THE PEACE CONFERENCE UNLESS I WOULD COMMIT US IN ADVANCE OF THE NEGOTIATION TO A PRECISE LINE OF WITHDRAWAL FOR ISRAEL. THIS WE CANNOT DO BEFORE THE CONFERENCE HAS EVEN CONVENED. ON THE OTHER HAND THERE ARE OTHER INDICATORS THAT HE WILL PROBABLY GO TO THE CONFERENCE AND THAT THIS IS ONLY BARGAINING. I TOLD HIM IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE A DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT BEFORE THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE BUT THAT IF HE COULD GIVE SENSITIVE EYES ONLY

ME SOME SPECIFIC SYRIAN IDEAS IN THIS REGARD WHICH I COULD DISCUSS WITH THE ISRAELIS, I COULD MAKE A MAJOR EFFORT TO BRING ABOUT A DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT ON THE SYRIAN-ISRAELI FRONT MORE OR LESS SYMMETRICAL WITH THE ONE WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE ON THE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN FRONT. I WILL BE EXPLORING SUNDAY WITH MRS. MIER ANY IDEAS SHE MAY HAVE IN THIS REGARD. I WILL THEN SEND OUR AMBASSADOR TO BEIRUT, BUFFUM, TO DAMASCUS ON TUESDAY FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS.

ON-FILE NSC  
RELEASE  
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

I PRESSED HIM VERY HARD ON THE POW ISSUE AND TOLD HIM THAT IT WOULD BE IN HIS INTERESTS TO PROVIDE THE ISRAELIS WITH A LIST, PERMIT RED CROSS VISITS AND EXCHANGE THE WOUNDED AT THE TIME THE PEACE CONFERENCE OPENS, AND HE COULD DEFER THE EXCHANGE OF THE REMAINDER OF THE PRISONERS UNTIL AN AGREEMENT ON THE DISENGAGEMENT WAS ACHIEVED. HE DID NOT BUDGE ON THIS, AND WE KNOW FROM OTHER PREVIOUS REPORTS THAT HE THINKS THAT HE CAN GET EVEN BETTER TERMS FROM THE ISRAELIS IN VIEW OF THE EMOTIONS ON THIS ISSUE IN ISRAEL DURING

SCOWCROFT MCFARLANE SEC FILES

**RECALLED**

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THIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

ASAD SAW IMMEDIATELY THE NEED FOR ONGOING PRACTICAL CONTACTS BETWEEN US AND HE HAS AGREED THAT WE CAN OPEN AN INTERESTS SECTION WITH THREE OR FOUR PEOPLE WITHOUT A LOT OF PUBLIC FANFARE.

I GOT SOME INSIGHT TO THE SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIETS. HE DID NOT GIVE ME THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE HAS BEEN MUCH CLOSE CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM WITH RESPECT TO PREPARATIONS FOR THE PEACE CONFERENCE AND HE SEEMED ANXIOUS TO HAVE DIRECT CONTACT WITH US. HE SEEMS TO BE CONCERTING HIS POSITION CLOSELY WITH SADAT. BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SYRIANS WILL BE HARD TO DEAL WITH.

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